TESTIMONY

This PDF document was made available from www.rand.org as a public service of the RAND Corporation.

Jump down to document ▼

The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world.

Support RAND

Browse Books & Publications

Make a charitable contribution

For More Information

Visit RAND at www.rand.org

Explore RAND Testimony

View document details

Report Documentation Page		*Form Approved* *OMB No. 0704-0188*

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

1. REPORT DATE **FEB 2006**	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED **00-00-2006 to 00-00-2006**
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE **Combating Al Qaeda and the Militant Islamic Threat**		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER
		5b. GRANT NUMBER
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER
6. AUTHOR(S)		5d. PROJECT NUMBER
		5e. TASK NUMBER
		5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) **Rand Corporation,1776 Main Street,PO Box 2138,Santa Monica,CA,90407-2138**		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
		11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)

12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Approved for public release; distribution unlimited

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES
The original document contains color images.

14. ABSTRACT

15. SUBJECT TERMS

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES **19**	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT **unclassified**	b. ABSTRACT **unclassified**	c. THIS PAGE **unclassified**			

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)
Prescribed by ANSI Std Z39-18

TESTIMONY

Combating Al Qaeda and the Militant Islamic Threat

BRUCE HOFFMAN

RAND
CORPORATION

Dr. Bruce Hoffman[1]
The RAND Corporation

Before the Committee on Armed Services
Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities
United States House of Representatives

February 16, 2006

Four and a half years into the war on terrorism, the United States stands at a crossroads. The
sustained successes of the war's early phases appear to have been stymied by the protracted
insurgency in Iraq and our inability either to kill or capture Usama bin Laden and his chief
lieutenant, Ayman al-Zawahiri. More consequential, but less apparent perhaps, has been our
failure to effectively counter our enemies' effective use of propaganda and related information
operations. Their portrayal of America and the West as an aggressive and predatory force
waging war on Islam not only continues to resonate among large segments of the Muslim world
but also continues to undermine our own efforts to break the cycle of recruitment and
regeneration that sustains al Qaeda and the militant, global jihadi movement it champions.
Although many reasons are often cited for the current stasis in America's war on terrorism——
from the diversion of attention from bin Laden and al-Zawahiri caused by Iraq to inchoate U.S.
public diplomacy efforts——the real cause is at once as basic as it is prosaic: we still don't know,
much less, understand our enemy.

 "If you know the enemy and know yourself," Sun Tzu famously advised centuries ago, "you need
not fear the results of a hundred battles." The war on terrorism has now lasted longer than
America's involvement in World War II: yet, even today we cannot claim with any credibility, much
less, acuity to have fulfilled Sun Tzu's timeless admonition. Indeed, what remains missing four
and a half years since this war began is a thorough, systematic understanding of our enemy:
encompassing motivation as well as mindset, decision-making processes as well as command
and control relationships; and ideological constructs as well as organizational dynamics.

Forty years ago the United States understood the importance of building this foundation in order
to effectively counter an enigmatic, unseen enemy motivated by a powerful ideology who also
used terrorism and insurgency to advance his cause and rally popular support. Although America
of course encountered many frustrations during the Vietnam conflict, a lack of understanding of

---

our adversary was not among them. Indeed, as early as 1965, the Pentagon had begun a program to analyze Vietcong morale and motivation based on detailed interviews conducted among thousands of guerrilla detainees. These voluminously detailed studies provided a road-map of the ideological and psychological mindset of that enemy: clearly illuminating the critical need to win what was then often termed the "other war"——the ideological struggle for the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people.[2] Even if the fundamental changes required in U.S. military strategy to overcome the Vietcong's appeal went ignored, tremendous effort and resources were devoted to understanding the enemy.

Today, Washington has no such program in the war on terrorism. America's counterterrorism strategy appears predominantly weighted towards a "kill or capture" approach targeting individual bad guys. This line of attack assumes that America's contemporary enemies——be they al Qaeda or the insurgents in Iraq——have a traditional center of gravity. It also assumes that these enemies simply need to be killed or imprisoned so that global terrorism or the Iraqi insurgency will both end. Accordingly, the attention of the U.S. military and intelligence community is directed almost uniformly towards hunting down militant leaders or protecting U.S. forces——not toward understanding the enemy we now face. This is a monumental failing not only because decapitation strategies have rarely worked in countering mass mobilization terrorist or insurgent campaigns, but also because al Qaeda's ability to continue this struggle is ineluctably predicated on its capacity to attract new recruits and replenish its resources.

The success of U.S. strategy will therefore ultimately depend on Washington's ability to counter al Qaeda's ideological appeal——and thus effectively address the three key elements of their strategy:

- the continued resonance of their message;
- their continued ability to attract recruits replenishing their ranks; and,
- their capacity for continual regeneration and renewal.

To do so, we first need to better understand the origins of the al Qaeda movement, the animosity and arguments that underpin it and indeed the region of the world from which its struggle emanated and upon which its hungry gaze still rests. Without knowing our enemy we cannot successfully penetrate their cells; we cannot knowledgeably sow discord and dissension in their

---

[2] The RAND Corporation actively contributed to these analyses in a series of detailed reported, based on voluminous interviews of captured Vietcong. See, for example: Leon Gouré, Anthony Russo, and D. Scott, *Some Findings of the Viet Cong Motivation and Morale Study: June-December 1965* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, RM-4911-12-ISA/ARPA, February 1966); Leon Gouré, J. M. Carrier, and D. Scott, *Some Findings of the Viet Cong Motivation and Morale Study: January-June 1966* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, RM-5137-ISA/ARPA, February 1966); J. M. and Charles Thomson, *Viet Cong Motivation and Morale: The Special Case of Chieu Hoi* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, RM-4830-2-ISA/ARPA, May 1966); J. C. Connell, *Viet Cong Motivation and Morale: A Preliminary Report* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, RM-4507/2-ISA, July 1968).

ranks and thus weaken them from within; and, we cannot fulfill the most basic requirements of an effective counterterrorist strategy——pre-empting and preventing terrorist operations and deterring their attacks. Until we recognize the importance of this vital prerequisite, America will remain perennially on the defensive: inherently reactive rather than proactive——deprived of the capacity to recognize, much less anticipate, important changes in our enemy's modus operandi, recruitment and targeting.

Knowing the Enemy: The State of Al Qaeda in Early 2006

The Department of Defense's recently published Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) accurately describes America's war on terrorism as the "long war." A critical, though unstated, dimension of this "long war" is the main reason for its longevity: an enemy that is at once as adaptive and resilient as it is malleable and implacable. Since 9/11 al Qaeda has clearly shown itself to be a nimble, flexible, and adaptive entity. Indeed, al Qaeda's greatest achievement has been the makeover it has given itself since 2001. The current al Qaeda thus exists more as an ideology than as an identifiable, unitary terrorist organization. It has become a vast enterprise——an international franchise with like-minded local representatives, loosely connected to a central ideological or motivational base, but advancing the remaining center's goals at once simultaneously and independently of each other. Hence, unlike the hierarchical, pyramidal structure that typified terrorist groups of the past, the current al Qaeda movement in the main is flatter, more linear and organizationally networked.

The result is that today there are many al Qaedas rather than the single al Qaeda of the past. It is now a more loosely organized and connected movement that mixes and matches organizational and operational styles whether dictated by particular missions or imposed by circumstances. Nonetheless, it would be mistaken to believe that al Qaeda does not still retain some important characteristics or aspects of a more organized entity with a central command and control structure, however weakened and reduced. Al Qaeda today, accordingly, can perhaps be usefully conceptualized as comprising four distinct, but not mutually exclusive, dimensions. In descending order of sophistication, they are:

1. **Al Qaeda Central.** This category comprises the remnants of the pre-9/11 al Qaeda organization. Although its core leadership includes some of the familiar, established commanders of the past, there are a number of new players who have advanced through the ranks as a result of the death or capture of key al Qaeda senior-level managers such as KSM, Abu Atef, Abu Zubayda, and Hambali, and most recently, Abu Faraj al-Libi and Abu Hamza al-Masri. It is believed that this hardcore remains centered in or around

Pakistan and continues to exert some coordination, if not actual command capability, in terms of commissioning attacks, directing surveillance and collating reconnaissance, planning operations, and approving their execution.

This category comes closest to the al Qaeda operational template or model evident in the 1998 East Africa embassy bombings and 9/11 attacks. Such high value, "spectacular" attacks are entrusted only to al Qaeda's professional cadre: the most dedicated, committed and absolutely reliable element of the movement. Previous patterns suggest that these "professional" terrorists are deployed in pre-determined and carefully selected teams. They will also have been provided with very specific targeting instructions. In some cases, such as the East Africa bombings, they may establish contact with, and enlist the assistance of, local sympathizers and supporters. This will be solely for logistical and other attack-support purposes or to enlist these locals to actually execute the attack(s). The operation, however, will be planned and directed by the "professional" element with the locals clearly subordinate and playing strictly a supporting role (albeit a critical one, though).

2. **Al Qaeda Affiliates and Associates.** This category embraces formally established insurgent or terrorist groups who over the years have benefited from bin Laden's largesse and/or spiritual guidance and/or have received training, arms, money and other assistance from al Qaeda. Among the recipients of this assistance have been terrorist groups and insurgent forces in Uzbekistan and Indonesia, Chechnya and the Philippines, Bosnia and Kashmir, among other places. By supporting these groups, bin Laden's intentions were three-fold. First, he sought to co-opt these movements' mostly local agendas and channel their efforts towards the cause of global jihad. Second, he hoped to create a jihadi "critical mass" from these geographically scattered, disparate movements that would one day coalesce into a single, unstoppable force. And, third, he wanted to foster a dependency relationship whereby as a quid pro quo for prior al Qaeda support, these movements would either undertake attacks at al Qaeda's behest or provide essential local, logistical and other support to facilitate strikes by the al Qaeda "professional" cadre noted above.

This category includes groups such as: al-Ittihad al-Islami (AIAI), Abu Musab Zarqawi's al Qaeda in Mesopotamia (formerly *Jamaat al Tawhid wa'l Jihad*), Asbat al-Ansar, Ansar al Islam, Islamic Army of Aden, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Jemaah Islamiya (JI), Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC), and the various Kashmiri Islamic groups based in

Pakistan——e.g., Harakat ul Mujahidin (HuM), Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), Laskar-e-Tayyiba (LeT), and Laskar I Jhangvi (LiJ).

3. **Al Qaeda Locals.** These are amorphous groups of al Qaeda adherents who are likely to have had some prior terrorism experience, will have been bloodied in battle as part of some previous jihadi campaign in Algeria, the Balkans, Chechnya, and perhaps more recently in Iraq, and may have trained in some al Qaeda facility before 9/11. They will therefore have had some direct connection with al Qaeda——however tenuous or evanescent. Their current relationship, and even communication, with a central al Qaeda command and control apparatus may be equally tenuous, if not actually dormant. The distinguishing characteristic of this category, however, is that there is some previous connection of some kind with al Qaeda.

   Specific examples of this adversary include Ahmed Ressam, who was arrested in December 1999 at Port Angeles, Washington State, shortly after he had entered the U.S. from Canada. Ressam, for instance, had a prior background in terrorism having belonged to Algeria's Armed Islamic Group (GIA). After being recruited to al Qaeda, he was provided with a modicum of basic terrorist training in Afghanistan. In contrast to the professional cadre detailed above, however, Ressam was given very non-specific, virtually open-ended targeting instructions before being dispatched to North America. Also, unlike the well-funded professional cadre, Ressam was given only $12,000 in 'seed money' and instructed to raise the rest of his operational funds from petty thievery. He was also told to recruit members for his terrorist cell from among the expatriate Muslim communities in Canada and the U.S.[3]

4. **Al Qaeda Network.** These are home-grown Islamic radicals——from North Africa, the Middle East, and South and South East Asia——as well as local converts to Islam mostly living in Europe, Africa and perhaps Latin America and North America as well, who have no direct connection with al Qaeda (or any other identifiable terrorist group), but nonetheless are prepared to carry out attacks in solidarity with or support of al Qaeda's radical jihadi agenda. They are motivated by a shared sense of enmity and grievance felt towards the United States and West in general and their host-nations in particular. In this case, the relationship with al Qaeda is more inspirational than actual; abetted by profound rage over the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq and the oppression of Muslims in Palestine, Kashmir, Chechnya, and elsewhere. Critically, these periods are

---

[3] See 1734HA01, United States District Court, Southern District of New York, United States of America v. Mokhtar Haouri, S4 00 Cr. 15 (JFK), 3 June 2001, pp. 538, 548, 589, 622, 658, & 697.

neither part of a known, organized group nor even a very cohesive entity unto themselves.

Examples of this category, which comprises small cells of like-minded locals who gravitate towards one to plan and mount terrorist attacks completely independent of any direction provided by al Qaeda, include the group of mostly Moroccan Islamic radicals based in Spain who carried out the March 2004 Madrid bombings and their counterparts in the Netherlands responsible for the November 2004 murder of Theo Van Gogh, among others.

The most salient threat posed by the above categories, however, continues to come from al Qaeda Central and then from its affiliates and associates. However, an additional and equally challenging threat is now posed by less discernible and more unpredictable entities drawn from the vast Muslim Diaspora in Europe. As far back as 2001, the Netherlands' intelligence and security service had detected increased terrorist recruitment efforts among Muslim youth living in the Netherlands whom it was previously assumed had been completely assimilated into Dutch society and culture.[4] Thus, representatives of Muslim extremist organizations had already succeeded in embedding themselves in, and drawing new sources of support from, receptive elements within established Diaspora communities. In this way, new recruits could be drawn into the movement who likely had not previously come under the scrutiny of local or national law enforcement agencies.

This new category of terrorist adversary, moreover, also has proven more difficult for the authorities in these countries to track, predict and anticipate. They comprise often previously unknown cells whom it is otherwise difficult, if not impossible, to effectively profile. Although the members may be marginalized individuals working in menial jobs from the lower socio-economic strata of society, some of whom with long criminal records or histories of juvenile delinquency; others may well come from solidly middle and upper-middle class backgrounds with university and perhaps even graduate degrees and prior passions for cars, sports, rock music and other completely secular, more ethereal interests. What they will have in common is a combination of a deep commitment to their faith——often recently re-discovered; admiration of bin Laden for the cathartic blow struck against America on 9/11; hatred of the U.S. and the West; and, a profoundly shared sense of alienation from their host countries. These new recruits are the anonymous cogs in the worldwide al Qaeda enterprise and include both long-standing residents and new

---

[4] See General Intelligence and Security Service, *Recruitment for the jihad in the Netherlands: from incident to trend* (The Hague: Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, December 2002).

immigrants found across Europe, but specifically in countries with large expatriate Muslim populations such as Britain, Spain, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Belgium.

The al Qaeda Movement's Ideological Resiliency and Continued Resonance

Despite the damage and destruction and losses of key leaders and personnel that al Qaeda has suffered over the past four-plus years, it stubbornly adheres to its fundamental raison d'etre: continuing to inspire and motivate the broader radical jihadi community. The principle of jihad is the ideological bond that unites this amorphous movement: surmounting its loose structure, diverse membership and geographical separation. The requirement to engage in jihad is relentlessly expounded in both video- and audio-tapes of bin Laden and al-Zawahiri and other senior al Qaeda personalities, on myriad jihadi web-sites, and by radical clericlay-preachers speaking in mosques or addressing informal circles of adherents in more private settings. The struggle is cast in narrow defensive terms: extolling the duty of the faithful to defend Islam by the sword. Imitation by example is encouraged through the depiction of the sacrifices of past martyrs (suicide terrorists and others who perished in battle against the infidel) coupled with messages about the importance of continuous battle against Islam's enemies. "It is no secret that warding off the American enemy is the top duty after faith and that nothing should take priority over it," bin Laden wrote in his seminal 1996 declaration of war.[5] Such exhortations continue to resonate today when many Muslims harbor a deep sense of humiliation and resentment over the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the continued bloodletting of their co-religionists in Palestine, Chechnya, and Kashmir among other places,[6] the ill-treatment of detainees at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo alongside the myriad other reasons jihadis have for hating the United States. Indeed, the expostulated theological requirement to avenge the shedding of innocent Muslim blood——and particularly that of Muslim children who have been killed in Iraq and Palestine——has repeatedly been invoked by bin Laden.[7] These calls for revenge coupled with the terrorists' own abiding faith in the potential regenerative power of even a single, new dramatic terrorist attack to breathe new life into the jihadi movement, ensure that the war on terrorism will be won neither easily nor soon.

Terrorist morale is also sustained by propaganda portraying the 9/11 attacks as a great victory and America's involvement in Iraq as a quagmire that will ultimately bring about the U.S.'s

---

[5] "Declaration of War Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places," in Alexander and Swetnam, *Usama bin Laden's al-Qaida: Profile of a Terrorist Network* (Ardsley, NY: Transnational, 2001), Appendix 1 A, p. 19.
[6] See, for example, "Text of Bin Laden Remarks: 'Hypocrisy Rears Its Ugly Head'," *Washington Post*, 8 October 2001.
[7] Ibid. See also, Anonymous, *Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America* (Dulles, VA: Brassey's, 2002), pp. 47 & 197.

downfall. The connection between the destruction of the World Trade Center and the blow struck against the U.S. economy by the 9/11 attacks has been a persistent jihadi theme.[8] It was repeated by bin Laden himself in the videotape broadcast on 29 October 2004, when he explained, "So we are continuing this policy in bleeding America to the point of bankruptcy. Allah willing, and nothing is too great for Allah."[9] Parallels are also drawn with the mujahideen's defeat of the Red Army in Afghanistan, the alleged chain reaction it set in motion that led to the demise of the Soviet Union and collapse of communism with the current travails the U.S. faces in Iraq and the inevitability of our defeat there at the hands of contemporary jihadis. Indeed, al Qaeda propaganda has long described the U.S. as a "paper tiger,"[10] on the verge of financial ruin and total collapse much as the USSR once was, with the power of Islam poised similarly to push America over the precipice.[11] Bin Laden emphasized this very point in his last publicly known address to his fighters in December 2001, when he declared that, "America is in retreat by the grace of God Almighty and economic attrition is continuing up to today. But it needs further blows. The young men need to seek out the nodes of the American economy and strike the enemy's nodes."[12] And, he repeated it again in the aforementioned videotape released just days before the 2004 American presidential elections. "This is in addition to our having experience in using guerrilla warfare and the war of attrition to fight tyrannical superpowers, as we, alongside the Mujahideen, bled Russia for ten years, until it went bankrupt and was forced to withdraw in defeat. All Praise is due to Allah."[13] This strategy thus continues to guide jihadi target selection and tactics today.

The al Qaeda movement's ability to continue to prosecute this struggle is also a direct reflection of its capacity to attract new recruits and replenish expended resources. Its survival may also be dependent upon the preservation of some core leadership cadre to champion and lead this campaign. In this respect, al Qaeda appears to retain at least some depth in managerial personnel as evidenced by its ability to produce successor echelons for the mid-level operational commanders who have been killed or captured. But the main challenge for al Qaeda and the wider jihadi movement is to promote and ensure its durability as an ideology and concept. It can only achieve this by staying in the news: elbowing itself into the limelight through dramatic and bloody attack, thereby promoting its continued relevance as the defenders and avengers of Muslims everywhere.[14] Violence will thus continue to be key to ensuring its continued presence

---

[8] Paul Eedle, "Terrorism.com," *The Guardian* (London), 17 July 2002.

[9] Al Jazeera.Net, "NEWS: Arab World——Full Transcript of bin Laden's speech," 1 November 2004 accessed at http://Englishaljazeera.net/NR/exeres/79C6AF22-98FB-4A1C-B21F-2BC36E87F61F.htm.

[10] Quoted in John Miller, "Interview; Osama Bin Laden (May 1998)" accessed at http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/binladen/who/interview.html.

[11] Anonymous, *Through Our Enemies' Eyes*, p. xix.

[12] Translation by, and personal communication with, Eedle, 31 July 2002.

[13] "Transcript: Full Text From The 18 Minute Tape Released By Al-Jazeera From Osama Bin Laden."

[14] Bin Laden's 29 October 2004 also evidenced this understanding. See Ibid.

as an international political force. Hence, al Qaeda and the wider movement's resiliency——if not, longevity——will thereby be predicated on its continued ability to recruit new cadre, mobilize the Muslim masses, and marshal support——both spiritual and practical——for jihad.

Amazingly, al Qaeda also claims that it is stronger and more capable now than it was on 9/11.[15] Al Qaeda propagandists on web sites and other forums, for instance, repeatedly point to a newfound vitality that has facilitated an operational capacity able to carry out at least two major attacks per year since 9/11 compared to the one attack every two years that it could implement before 9/11. "We are still chasing the Americans and their allies everywhere," al-Zawahiri crowed in December 2003, "even in their homeland."[16] Irrespective of whether our definition of a major attack and al Qaeda's are the same, propaganda doesn't have to be true to be believed: all that matters is that it is communicated effectively and persuasively——precisely the two essential components of information operations that al Qaeda has mastered.

What bin Laden also doubtless understands is that in the post-9/11 world, terrorism's power to coerce, and intimidate; to force changes in our daily lives; and to influence our policies and affect how and on what we spend money, have all increased enormously. In this respect, the stakes have not only grown, but public fears and expectations have as well. More and more, the metric of success in the war on terrorism is defined as the ability of intelligence agencies and law enforcement organizations to prevent, pre-empt and deter attacks. Conversely, the metric of success for the terrorists has become simply the ability to act. Although there is a world of difference between bombing a bar on a Saturday night in Bali and laying the World Trade Towers to waste and severely damaging the Pentagon, the impact is no longer completely dissimilar. The tragic loss of innocent life in any attack linked to al Qaeda is calculated by its masterminds to rekindle worldwide the same profound fears and anxieties that the attacks on 9/11 ignited. Al Qaeda's stature and receptiveness in parts of the world today is still a product of the extraordinary success achieved and attention generated by the attacks that day. In these circumstances, we have to be careful to avoid impatience and the temptation to declare victory in the war on terrorism——and not least precipitous optimism. Countering terrorism is akin to taking a time series of photographs. The image captured on film today is not the same as yesterday nor will it be the same tomorrow.[17] Terrorism, accordingly, is constantly changing, evolving: no more so, and indeed, far more rapidly and consequentially, in the period of time since 9/11.

---

[15] See Dana Priest and Walter Pincus, "New Target and Tone: Message Shows Al Qaeda's Adaptability," *Washington Post*, 16 April 2004; and, Geoffrey Nunberg, "Bin Laden's Low-Tech Weapon," *New York Times*, 18 April 2004.
[16] Associated Press, "Purported al-Qaida Tape Warns of Attacks," 19 December 2003.
[17] Analogy made by the renowned French terrorism expert and criminologist, Xavier Raufer, April 2003.

The Iraqi Insurgency As A Harbinger of the Future

The escalating insurgency in Iraq has emerged as a critical front in al Qaeda's struggle. Iraq had already emerged as an important rallying cry for al Qaeda and the radical jihadi movement even before the actual invasion began. The call to arms that al Qaeda issued, however, was not in support of Saddam Hussein or his regime, but in resistance to what was——and is still—— perceived as continued U.S. and Western aggression against Muslims and neo-colonialist encroachment on Muslim lands. In fact, the idea that al Qaeda wanted to make Iraq the central battlefield of jihad was first suggested by al Qaeda itself. In February 2003, a month before the U.S.-led coalition even invaded Iraq, the movement's information department released the fifth and sixth installments of a series of on-line articles entitled *In the Shadow of the Lances* that had begun to appear shortly after the 9/11 attacks. Although the previous installments had been written by al Qaeda's chief spokesman, Sulaiman Abu Ghaith, who had been trained as a theologian and Muslim cleric, these two, new issues were authored by Saif al-Adel,[18] the movement's chief of military operations, one of its most senior commanders and a warrior by training who had been an officer in the Egyptian Army's Special Forces and a military trainer at al Qaeda's al-Farook camp in Afghanistan.[19] In these two issues, al-Adel imparted practical advice to Iraqis and foreign jihadis on how guerrilla warfare tactics could be used against the American and British troops. "Turn the mujahedin military force into small units with good administrative capabilities," he suggested, since this "will spare us big losses. Large military units pose management problems," al-Adl further explained. "They occupy large areas which are difficult to conceal from air reconnaissance and air attack."[20] His exhortations echoed previous statements made by bin Laden since at least 1996 about the asymmetric virtues of guerrilla warfare. Indeed, the al Qaeda leader has often cited the victory he claims was achieved with this tactic against American forces in Mogadishu, Somalia during October 1993——when 18 U.S. Army Rangers and Delta Force commandos were killed in fighting with Somali militiamen and, according to bin Laden, al Qaeda fighters too.[21] "[I]t must be obvious to you," bin Laden had stated in his 1996 declaration of war, "that, due to the imbalance of power between our armed forces and the enemy forces, a suitable means of fighting must be adopted, i.e. using fast moving light forces that work under complete secrecy. In other words to initiate a guerrilla warfare, were [*sic*] the sons of the

---

[18] Ben Venzke and Aimee Ibrahim, *al-Qaeda's Advice for Mujahideen in Iraq: Lessons Learned in Afghanistan, v 1.0* (Alexandria, VA: IntelCenter, 14 April 2003), passim.
[19] Burke, *Al-Qaeda: Casting A Shadow Of Terror* (London & New York, I.B. Tauris, 2003), p. 105.
[20] "Al Qaeda Organization Addresses a Message to Iraqi, Islamic Peoples (Internet) www.alfjr.com in Arabic," 5 March 2003. [Posting by "Ayn al-Haqiqah," entitled "The al Qaeda Organization Writes a Letter to the Iraqi People" in the "Issues of the Islamic Nation" section of the chatroom of www.alfjr.com, on 5 March 2003.] See also Anonymous, *Imperial Hubris*, pp. 60-61; and Venzke and Ibrahim, *al-Qaeda's Advice for Mujahideen in Iraq*.
[21] These events are described in Mark Bowden, *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1999) and the Hollywood commercial film of the same name.

nation, and not the military forces, take part in it."[22] For bin Laden, the withdrawal of American military forces that followed is proof that terrorism and guerrilla warfare can defeat more powerful opponents.

Al Qaeda's entreaties to jihadis to descend on Iraq and confront the U.S. and coalition military forces only intensified after the fall of Baghdad. For example, a statement posted on the movement's al neda.com website on 9 April 2003—which was clearly written after American forces had entered the Iraqi capital, lauded the virtues of guerrilla warfare against conventional military opponents. Under the heading 'Guerrilla Warfare Is the most Powerful Weapon Muslims have, and It is The Best Method to Continue the Conflict with the Crusader Enemy,' these lessons of history were cited to rally jihadis for renewed battle. "With guerilla warfare," it explained,

> the Americans were defeated in Vietnam and the Soviets were defeated in Afghanistan. This is the method that expelled the direct Crusader colonialism from most of the Muslim lands, with Algeria the most well known. We still see how this method stopped Jewish immigration to Palestine, and caused reverse immigration of Jews from Palestine. The successful attempts of dealing defeat to invaders using guerilla warfare were many, and we will not expound on them. However, these attempts have proven that the most effective method for the materially weak against the strong is guerrilla warfare.[23]

The clearest explication of al Qaeda's strategy in Iraq was provided by Zawahiri himself on the occasion of the second anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. "We thank God," he declared, "for appeasing us with the dilemmas in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Americans are facing a delicate situation in both countries. If they withdraw they will lose everything and if they stay, they will continue to bleed to death."[24] On the attacks' third anniversary, he issued a slightly different version of the same statement, now proclaiming that U.S. defeat in Iraq and Afghanistan "has become just a question of time. . . . . The Americans in both countries are between two fires," Zawahiri explained. "[I]f they continue, they will bleed until death, and if they withdraw, they will lose everything."[25] Indeed, what U.S. military commanders optimistically described in late 2003 as the jihadi "magnet" or terrorist "flytrap" orchestrated by the U.S. invasion of Iraq is thus viewed very differently by al Qaeda. "Two years after Tora Bora," Zawahiri observed in December 2003, "the American bloodshed [has] started to increase in Iraq and the Americans are unable to defend

---

[22] "Declaration of War Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places," in Alexander and Swetnam, *Usama bin Laden's al-Qaida,* Appendix 1 A, p. 11.
[23] MEMRI Special Dispatch—Jihad and Terrorism Studies, 11 April 2003, no. 493 quoting http://www.cubezero.nt/vhsvideo/imagis/?subject=2&rec=1043.
[24] Quoted in Anonymous, *Imperial Hubris,* p. xxi.
[25] Quoted in Walter Pincus, "Al Qaeda Releases Tape Predicting U.S. Defeat," *Washington Post*, 10 September 2004.

themselves."[26] For al Qaeda, accordingly, Iraq has likely been a very useful side-show: an effective means to preoccupy American military forces and distract U.S. attention while al Qaeda and its confederates make new inroads and strike elsewhere. On a personal level, it may have also provided bin Laden and al-Zawahiri with the breathing space that they desperately needed to further obfuscate their trail. But most importantly, Iraq has figured prominently in al Qaeda and jihadi plans and propaganda as a means to reinvigorate the jihadi cause and sustain its momentum as well as engage U.S. forces in battle and thus perpetuate the image of Islam cast perpetually on the defensive with no alternative but to take up arms against American and Western aggressors. In addition, the ongoing violence in Iraq coupled with the inability of U.S. and coalition and Iraqi security forces to maintain order and the Abu Ghraib revelations along with other disadvantageous developments, have all doubtless contributed to America's poor standing in the Muslim world.

Finally, whatever the outcome of the current conflict in Iraq, its consequences will likely be felt for years to come. Much like Afghanistan after the struggle against the Soviet occupation ended in that country, the surviving foreign jihadis who fought in Iraq will eventually return to their home countries or the émigré communities that they came from. Having been bloodied in battle in Iraq, they will possess the experience, cachet and credibility useful for both jihadi recruitment and operational purposes elsewhere. Moreover, in contrast to the mujahideen who returned home from Afghanistan a decade and a half ago who were mostly trained in rural guerrilla warfare, this new generation of jihadis will have acquired in Iraq invaluable first-hand experience in urban warfare——including the construction of vehicular and roadside IEDs, the use of stand-off weaponry like mortars and similar remote-control fired devices, assassination and kidnapping techniques, and sniper and ambush tactics.[27] The application of these newly learned capabilities to urban centers in Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, South Asia and elsewhere could result in a precipitous escalation of bloodshed and destruction, reaching into countries and regions that hitherto have experienced little, if any, organized jihadi violence. While the threat to Europe is perhaps the most serious, the danger may be greatest in Saudi Arabia: the country from which the overwhelming majority jihadis (61 percent) fighting in Iraq hail.[28]

---

[26] Quoted in Associated Press, "Purported al-Qaida Tape Warns of Attacks."
[27] See Douglas Jehl, "Iraq May Be Prime Place for Training of Militants, C.I.A. Report Concludes," *New York Times*, 22 June 2005.
[28] Followed by Syria (10 percent) and Kuwait seven percent). See Reuven Paz, "Arab volunteers killed in Iraq: an Analysis," PRISM Series of Global Jihad, vol. 3, no. 1 (March 2005), p. 2 accessed at www.e-prism.org/pages/4/index.htm.

Conclusion[29]

The "Long War" posited by the recent Quadrennial Defense Review argues that the U.S. is likely to still be fighting the war on terrorism, countering insurgency, and involved in nation-building efforts for at least the next decade or more. To a significant degree, our ability to carry out such missions effectively will depend on the ability of American strategy to adjust and adapt to changes we see in the nature and character of our adversaries. At the foundation of such a dynamic and adaptive policy must be the ineluctable axiom that successfully countering terrorism as well as insurgency is not exclusively a military endeavor but also involves fundamental parallel political, social, economic, and ideological activities. As this testimony has previously argued, the predominantly tactical "kill or capture" approach and metric that currently guides our counterterrorist and counterinsurgent efforts is too narrow and does not sufficiently address the complexities of these unique operational environments. The adversaries and the threats we face today, however, are much more elusive and complicated to be vanquished by mere decapitation. Moreover, what worked for the U.S. during the initial operations of the war on terrorism in 2001 and 2002——when we faced a differently configured and structured al Qaeda, for instance, and before the intensification of the insurgency in Iraq——will likely not prove as effective given the recent changes and evolution we have witnessed in both. In so fluid an environment, our strategy must accordingly change and adapt as well. What will be required today and in the future to ensure continued success, therefore, is a more integrated, systems approach to a complex problem that is at once operationally durable, evolutionary and elusive in character. In sum, we will need to adjust and adapt our strategy, resources, and tactics to formidable opponents that, as we have seen, are widely dispersed and decentralized and whose many destructive parts are autonomous, mobile, and themselves highly adaptive.

That the above description conforms as much as to the current insurgency in Iraq as to the new form that al Qaeda and the radical jihadi threat has assumed, says volumes about the challenge this operational environment poses to U.S. national security. An effective response will thus ineluctably be predicated upon a strategy that effectively combines the tactical elements of systematically destroying and weakening enemy capabilities (the "kill or capture" approach) alongside the equally critical, broader strategic imperative of breaking the cycle of terrorist and insurgent recruitment and replenishment that have respectively sustained both al Qaeda's continued campaign and the ongoing conflict in Iraq.

---

[29] This section incorporates and builds upon previous work done in collaboration between the author and Lieutenant Colonel Fred T. Krawchuk, U.S. Army, Special Forces.

Accordingly, rather than viewing the fundamental organizing principle of American national defense strategy in this unconventional realm as a global war on terrorism (GWOT) as it has been to date, it may be more useful to re-conceptualize it in terms of a global counterinsurgency (GCOIN). Such an approach would a priori knit together the equally critical political, economic, diplomatic, and developmental sides inherent to the successful prosecution of counterinsurgency to the existing dominant military side of the equation.[30]

Greater attention to this integration of American capabilities would provide incontrovertible recognition of the importance of endowing a GCOIN with an overriding and comprehensive, multi-dimensional, policy. Ideally, this policy would embrace several elements: including a clear strategy, a defined structure for implementing it, and a vision of inter-government agency cooperation, and the unified effort to guide it. It would have particular benefit with respect to the gathering and exploitation of "actionable intelligence." By updating and streamlining interagency counterterrorism and counterinsurgency systems and procedures both strategically as well as operationally between DoD, the Department of State, and the intelligence community, actionable intelligence could likely be acquired, analyzed and disseminated faster and operations mounted more quickly. A more focused and strengthened interagency process would also facilitate the coordination of key themes and messages and the development and execution of long-term "hearts and minds" programs.[31]

In any event, success in the campaign against global terrorism and radical jihadism will ultimately depend on how effectively the U.S. can build bridges and untangle lines of authority, de-conflict overlapping responsibilities and improve the ability to prioritize and synchronize interagency operations in a timely and efficient manner. Organizations will therefore have to do——or be compelled to do——what they have been reluctant to do in the past: reaching across bureaucratic territorial divides and sharing resources in order to defeat terrorists, insurgencies, and other emerging threats. Clarifying these expectations and processes is a critical step in efficiently addressing contemporary threats to U.S. security as is creating incentives to more effectively blend diplomacy, justice, development, finance, intelligence, law enforcement, and military capabilities and coherently generating and applying resources to defeat terrorist and insurgent threats.

---

[30] This ineluctable principle of countering insurgency was first defined by Field Marshal Sir Gerald Templer in Malaya more than 50 yeas ago. "The shooting side of the business is only 25% of the trouble and the other 75% lies in getting the people of this country behind us," Templer famously wrote in November 1952, responding to a communist directive from the previous year that focused on increase appreciably "cajolery" of the population. Quoted in John Cloake, *Templer: Tiger of Malaya——The Life of Field Marshal Sir Gerald Templer*, (London: Harrap, 1985), p. 262.

[31] Facilitating this would doubtless go well beyond DoD's purview, necessarily involving the National Security Council or the emerging National Counterterrorism Center and would likely entail the development of an "operational arm" with the authority of the President to de-conflict, synchronize, and task the various agencies of the government involved in counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations.

Even the best strategy will be proven inadequate if military and civilian agency leaders are not prepared to engage successfully within ambiguous environments and reorient their organizational culture to deal with irregular threats. A successful GCOIN transcends the need for better tactical intelligence or new organizations. It is fundamentally about transforming the attitudes and mindsets of leaders so that they have the capacity to take decisive, yet thoughtful action against terrorists and/or insurgents in uncertain or unclear situations based on a common vision, policy, and strategy. In addition to traditional "hard" military skills of "kill or capture" and destruction and attrition; "soft" skills such as negotiations, psychology, social and cultural anthropology, foreign area studies, complexity theory, and systems management will become increasingly important in the ambiguous and dynamic environment in which irregular adversaries circulate.

Arguably, by combating irregular adversaries in a more collaborative and integrative manner with key relevant civilian agencies, those charged with countering terrorism and insurgency can better share critical information, track the various moving parts in terrorist/insurgency networks, and develop a comprehensive picture of this enemy——including their supporters, nodes of support, organizational and operational systems, processes, and plans. With this information in hand, the U.S. would then be better prepared to systematically disrupt or defeat all of the critical nodes that support the entire terrorist/insurgent network, thus rendering them ineffective.[32] Achieving this desideratum, however, will necessitate the coordination, de-conflicting, and synchronization of the variety of programs upon which the execution of American counterterrorist and/or counterinsurgency planning are dependent. An equally critical dimension of this process will be aligning the training of host nation counterparts with U.S. counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations: building synergy; avoiding duplication of effort; ensuring that training leads to operational effectiveness; and ensuring that the U.S. interagency team and approach is in complete harmony. In other words, aligning these training programs with operations to build indigenous capabilities in counterterrorism and counterinsurgency will be absolutely fundamental to the success of such a strategy.

In sum, new times, new threats, and new challenges ineluctably make a new strategy, approach and new organizational and institutional behaviors necessary. The threat posed by elusive and deadly irregular adversaries emphasizes the need to anchor changes that will more effectively

---

[32] Battle against small, independent, and mobile formations change too rapidly to allow rigid, centralized command and control. The US military will have to continue to adjust and fight accordingly. Fast and fluid bottom-up planning and execution, supported by top-down guidance, resources and support is an appropriate approach to counterinsurgency. Intelligence logistics, and communications must integrate horizontally and vertically with operations to support this innovative approach to fighting insurgents. Counterinsurgency forces, with clear guidance and appropriate technology, can be both responsive C4ISR and effective execution nodes, greatly shortening the decision-making loop while still allowing the passing of information on actions and results to higher levels for strategic analysis.

close the gap between detecting irregular adversarial activity and rapidly defeating it. The effectiveness of U.S. strategy will be based on our capacity to think like a networked enemy, in anticipation of how they may act in a variety of situations, aided by different resources. This goal requires that the American national security structure in turn organize itself for maximum efficiency, information sharing, and the ability to function quickly and effectively under new operational definitions. With this thorough understanding in mind, we need to craft an approach that specifically takes into account the following key factors to effectively wage a GCOIN:

1. Separating the enemy from the populace that provides support and sustenance. This, in turn, entails three basic missions:
   a) Denial of enemy sanctuary
   b) Elimination of enemy freedom of movement
   c) Denial of enemy resources and support;
2. Identification and neutralization of the enemy;
3. Creation of a secure environment——progressing from local to regional to global;
4. Ongoing and effective neutralization of enemy propaganda through the planning and execution of a comprehensive and integrated information operations and holistic civil affairs campaign in harmony with the first four tasks;
5. Interagency efforts to build effective and responsible civil governance mechanisms that eliminate the fundamental causes of terrorism and insurgency.

The key to success will be in harnessing the overwhelming kinetic force of the U.S. military as part of a comprehensive vision to transform capabilities in order to deal with irregular and unconventional threats. A successful strategy will therefore also be one that thinks and plans ahead with a view towards addressing the threats likely to be posed by the terrorist and insurgent generation beyond the current one.